

Submission

Electoral Reform Green Paper – Strengthening Australia’s Democracy

I am an Australian citizen (born 1952) and have lived in the UK since 1984 following my marriage to a UK citizen. My submission primarily relates to Chapter 4 of the Electoral Reform Green Paper – The Franchise. I have the following comments:-

4.38 I have been disenfranchised because of the enrolment restrictions in the Electoral Act. I agree with the points made in paragraph 4.38 – the current enrolment provisions appear complicated. Also, in 1984 when I advised the Electoral Office that I was moving overseas I do not recall being given any clear information as to my ongoing entitlement to vote in Australian elections.

4.39 I consider that all Australian citizens living overseas should have the same voting entitlement as those living in Australia. I agree with the arguments in support of voting rights for citizens living overseas contained in paragraph 4.39. Over the years I have maintained regular contact with family and friends in Australia and have returned “home” for annual visits since coming to live in the UK in 1984.

Also, reasonable telephone rates and the Internet have made the world a much smaller place and it has become much easier to keep an active interest in both political and social matters.

4.40 However, I do not agree with the arguments raised in point 4.40 against an expansion of the expatriate franchise. I am affected by election results as political decisions made in Australia can affect me directly. As an example, I retain investments in Australia and pay Australian withholding tax.

Also I can understand, but not necessarily agree, with the point raised about additional costs should the expatriate electorate increase dramatically. However, the possibilities raised by electronic voting, the pros and cons of which are clearly laid out in chapter 11, may provide an answer for the future.

4.41 I particularly agree with the first bullet point in paragraph 4.41. I think the requirement to return to Australia, even for a short visit, within, say, three years is a fair condition to retain voting entitlement.

If the franchise were to be extended to all expatriates I think there would be a case for making voting compulsory. Whilst I accept that not everyone would be happy with this, personally I would have no objection.

Two further comments that do not relate to expatriates are:-

1. I agree with the point raised in paragraph 4.48 concerning prisoners – “by committing a serious offence against society, prisoners have failed to comply with

their civic responsibilities and therefore lost their claim to civic rights such as voting.”

2. I think that eligibility for the franchise for all Federal and State/Territory elections should be uniform throughout the whole country. Whilst Australia is a large country geographically, in the 21st century I can see no logic in having differing ‘terms and conditions’ for what is still a relatively small population.

I identify strongly with my Australian roots (even after 25 years I still call Australia “home”!) and subscribe to organisations that keep expatriates informed of what is happening in Australia. I also belong to organisations in Australia that maintain a strong bond with my upbringing e.g. my father’s A.I.F. Battalion Association. As the daughter of a Digger I feel very patriotic and proud to be Australian.

Given the opportunity I should very much like to be able to vote in Australian elections.

24 November 2009